

AN
APOLOGY
for the
METHODISTS;
BEING A COPY OF A
LETTER

to
The Reverend Henry Stokes,

VICAR OF DOVERIDGE, DERBYSHIRE.

CONTAINING

SOME ANIMADVERSIONS ON ONE OF HIS LATE
DISCOURSES, AND ON A CERTAIN
Combination
IN THAT PARISH.

BY

MICHAEL THOMAS SADLER.

— Pudet hæc opprobra nobis
Et dici potuisse, et non potuisse refelli.

OVID. MET.



STOCKPORT;

PRINTED, FOR THE AUTHOR, BY J. CLARKE.

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PREFACE.

IT may not be improper briefly to relate the circumstances, which gave rise to the following letter.

A Methodist Preacher* was some time since solicited, and agreed to preach at Doveridge; accordingly, the inhabitants were informed of it, many of whom expressed their approbation, and promised attendance. In the mean time, an Article was drawn up by the Minister, and carried round the parish by some noted champions for signatures, many of which were compulsory. The purport of this agreement was, to bind themselves, and prevent all their dependents, from attending the meeting; which, to make it as odious as possible, was illusively represented as jacobinical.

The Preacher's visit was merely occasional; but a room was afterwards built, and regular preaching introduced, which was so well attended, and so generally approved of, that the persecutors were still more enraged: a Bond was proposed, which should *more effectually* prevent them from having any intercourse whatever with any who should attend the meetings; even the parish pay of the offending paupers was to be withheld. Thus the bigoted Jews would have no dealings with the dissenting Samaritans. This scheme was found to be impracticable, but it sufficiently showed the malice and ignorance of its proposers.

The sermon alluded to was afterwards preached, which was considered as an ecclesiastical anathema. I did not hear it, but from the concurrent testimony

* Mr. Morley, then in the Ashby circuit.

of several who did, I thought it my duty to send the preacher some remarks on it, which I did in a letter, of which the following is a copy; to which he made no replication.

These circumstances induced me to write this letter: its contemptuous reception, and the false reports that were industriously propagated concerning it, determined me to publish it; and this may show those, who have (though altogether ignorant of its contents) so grossly misrepresented it, what a little candour might have taught them to expect it contained. Mr. Stokes was by some means apprised of my intention, and he applied to the person, whom I had agreed with for that purpose, not to print it; who accordingly declined it, being apprehensive that the malicious efforts of that party concerned, might have affected his trade, had he disregarded Mr. Stokes's interdiction. What could induce Mr. S. to desire *him* not to print it, I cannot imagine; he probably supposed, that preventing him, would stop the publication. However, this circumstance has served to show, that he is equally averse to Liberty of the Presb., as to Liberty of Conscience; two essential parts of our Constitution, which, I am sorry to say, would be merely nominal privileges, were they at his controul. Although his sermon was pointed at that family, who introduced and support Methodism in the parish, yet he would prevent them from making any reply: his attack was publick, which would of itself be a sufficient reason for making this so.

I shall not trouble the reader by noticing the various species of persecution, which those who have attended the meeting have experienced, or the menaces this letter has occasioned. All these exertions have hitherto proved ineffectual; for though the

Methodists in Doveridge are but few, yet they are those, who are not to be awed or influenced by the inane threatenings, or the malevolent efforts, of their most virulent opposers.

Were these combined bigots asked their reason for persecuting others, few could produce any whatever; those who did, would say, it was their zeal for the Church, and the service of God; and a Minister of the Gospel cannot commence persecutor on any other grounds whatever, or plead any other excuse. Does then the Church stand in need of such support and service? if it do, it is no better than Popery and Mahometism, which are founded on tyranny and oppression. Besides, persecution never fails to make the persecuted party formidable, and that of its opposers contemptible. But, to pretend that it is a zeal for God and religion that induces them to oppress others, is the most palpable illusion. Who hath required this at your hands? It is blasphemous to say, that endeavouring to ruin or destroy our fellow-creatures, fellow-subjects, and fellow-christians, for doing the best act they are capable of, (that is, for worshipping God in that manner, which they conceive will be most pleasing and acceptable to him), is serving that God, who has commanded us to love our enemies, and our neighbours as ourselves. God accepts no such service: and when men are angry for their particular opinions and professions, and persecute others for their sake, let them not belie Jesus Christ, and say it is for Him; but let them openly confess, that it is interest or ambition that prompts them to it. Persecution is nothing but the war of craft against conscience; the profligate and profane are its chief promoters, and the most virtuous and innocent are always the sufferers. There will be different opinions while there are men in the world;

.....

but that disfiance does not naturally, and should not be suffered to produce any alienation of affection, or dissolve the bonds of charity.

I would not be meant to cast the least invidious reflection on those, who unwillingly signed the agreement alluded to, and whose subsequent conduct has evinced the liberality of their sentiments: a description of the *principal promoters* of that combination would sufficiently expose it, but I scarcely think them worth noticing. Amongst that list there is one, who, though of very inconsiderable consequence in the parish, has wonderfully distinguished himself in the good old cause of persecution. Indeed, opposition might naturally be expected from him, as it is his interest to oppose religion under any shape whatever, and he had much rather see the parish well-stocked with Drunkards than Methodists. I must confess he has unanswerable reasons against them, which defy confutation; I might argue with a Guinea merchant against the selling of slaves, with equal success: yet, it is astonishing that others should see greater criminality in attending a Methodist meeting, on a Sunday evening, than in spending the same time at his house in dissipation or drunkenness. But I shall ever think it a *credit* to Methodism, to be opposed by persons of his character and profession.

I am conscious of the many deficiencies that will be discovered in the following letter: if the reader would see a better and complete defence of Methodism, I would refer him to the Rev. J. Wesley's *Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion*, Mr. Benson's Letters to Dr. Tatham, &c. But as this was not intended for publication, I hope he will the more readily excuse its imperfections.

DOVERIDGE, 22nd May, 1797.

COPY OF A LETTER

to

The Reverend HENRY STOKES,
VICAR OF DOVERIDGE, DERBYSHIRE.

REVEREND SIR;

I WAS sorry to hear, that one of your late discourses consisted chiefly of illiberal declamations against those, who presume to differ from the Established Church; and particularly the Methodists. I had not the opportunity of hearing it, but believe the substance of it was what is commonly urged against them by their opposers, and has been repeatedly answered; viz., That they are enthusiasts and schismatics; that their teachers are poor, illiterate men; that their followers are the offscouring of all things; that they undermine, and wish to overthrow, the Church; that as they neglect its ordinances, they cannot be in a faving state; &c. As I am a sharer of the aspersions cast upon them by their calumniators, I hope it will not be deemed unseemly if I briefly attempt their defence.

With regard to their being enthusiasts. I am at a loss to know what determinate idea is affixed to the term enthusiasm. If to be (1) zealously affected in a good cause; if a strict and conscientious regard to the precepts of the gospel; if (2) loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, be enthusiastical,

(1) Gal. iv. 18. (2) Mark xii. 30.

the generality of the Methodists deserve the appellation, and have no reason to be ashamed of it. A vigorous and indefatigable pursuit after high attainments in the languages, arts, and sciences, is praiseworthy; and is not a fervent regard to the interests of religion, and warm and zealous efforts to experience a plenitude of the blessings it promises, far more so? God abhors a languid, lukewarm service, (1) because thou art neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Or if to believe that (2) "godly men inwardly feel God's holy Spirit inflaming their hearts with love"; and professing to experience (3) the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us, (which is generally what is referred to), be enthusiasm; the Church of England, as well as the Bible and Methodism, is enthusiastical. To prove this, numerous passages might be adduced, but I shall confine myself to a few. In her daily service, we pray God to grant us his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him which we do at this present, and that the rest of our lives hereafter may be pure and holy: for the King, that God would replenish him with the grace of his Holy Spirit; and to the same effect for the Royal Family, for the Clergy and People; for the Catholic Church, &c.; and that the fellowship and communion of the Holy Ghost may be with us all evermore. And the Collects are full of petitions for this inspiration: (4) Grant that we may be daily renewed by thy Holy Spirit. (5) — being filled with the Holy Ghost, may love and bless our persecutors. (6) Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity. (7) O Lord, from whom

(1) Rev. iii. 16. (2) Hom. on Certain Places of Scrip., Pt. i.

(3) Rom. v. 5. (4) Collect for Christmas Day. (5) St. Stephen's

Day. (6) Quinquages. Sun. (7) 5th Sun. after East.

all good things do come, grant unto us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration, we may think those things that are good, and by thy merciful guidance may perform the same. (1) O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee ; mercifully grant that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts. (2) Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit ; that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name ; &c. So likewise the Homilies : " God gave them of old grace to be his children, as he doth to us now ; but now by the coming of our saviour Christ, we have received more abundantly the spirit of God in our hearts". Hom. on Faith, Pt. 2nd. " We have the Holy Spirit in our hearts, as a seal and pledge of our everlasting inheritance". Hom. on Resur. " In reading of God's holy word, he profiteth most, that is most inspired with the Holy Ghost". Hom. on reading Scrip. Pt. 1. " Let us therefore meekly call upon the bountiful Spirit, the Holy Ghost, to inspire us with his presence ; that we may be able to hear the goodness of God to our salvation ; for without this lively inspiration, we cannot so much as speake the name of the Mediator ; &c. Hom. on Rogation Week, Pt. 3. " It is the Holy Ghost that doth quicken the minds of men, stirring up godly motions in their hearts ; neither doth he think it sufficient, inwardly to work the new birth of man, unles he do also dwell and abide in him ; &c.—O what comfort is this to the heart of a true Christian, to think that the Holy Ghost dwelleth in him". Refer to the whole of the Hom. on Whit-sunday ; &c.

And no Methodist professeth to experience anything further than what is implied by these passages,

(1) 19th Sun. after Trin. (2) Commun. Office.

and others that might be referred to on the same subject: and if this be enthusiasm, I hope you, as a Christian, and a member of the Church of England, are an enthusiast; and as a minister of Jesus Christ, you preach fanaticism. Or, if by enthusiasm be meant ridiculous or absurd opinions in religious matters; if it supersede reason and revelation, and substitute in the room, groundless fancies and delusions; I assure you, Reverend Sir, the Methodists are no more enthusiasts than yourself; their notions are as consistent with reason and scripture, and themselves as free from that spirit of madness, which is the characteristic of fanaticism.

If separating from a National Established Church be schism; the Church of England is guilty of it, by separating from the Church of Rome. But it may be replied, it was necessary....And the Dissenters think there is just cause for separating from the present Establishment. But you think there is no just reason for a separation....So thought the Pope, no doubt, at the time of the Reformation, but he was not permitted to decide; and no earthly power has a right to determine, in religious differences, much less an interested party. It has been the universal custom of an established party, when lacking better arguments, to accuse all those who differ from them, of heresy and schism. There are several national establishments in Europe, which differ from each other in several respects, the bigots of each of which think nobody right but themselves; and deem all those heretics, who do not implicitly conform to theirs. And if I be in one of those states whose establishment I cannot agree with, if I would avoid this imputation, I must hypocritically conform to it, whatever may be my sentiments: in England, I must be what is called a Churchman; in Italy, Spain,

Portugal, &c., a Papist ; in Scotland and Holland, a Calvinist ; in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, a Lutheran ; in Russia, I must assume a different profession to all these : in short, in whatever country I might chance to be, I must, like the honest Vicar of Bray, bend my principles to my interests ; or

— “Wear the red marks
Of superstition’s scourge”.

But, if a blind, bigoted principle of attachment to establishments, had always prevailed, Christianity would never have been believed, nor its corruptions reformed : and while the zealots of our Church maintain that they only are right, and that those who differ from them are in error, and are guilty of schism ; they assume that infallibility, which they once so much depreciated in his Holiness the Pope. I humbly conceive, when a body of men dissent from any establishment, merely to worship God in a manner more agreeable to the scriptures or their consciences, they are in no danger from the asperous denunciations of those who pronounce them heretics. (1) “This I confess unto thee, after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets”. And we must be content to bear the appellation, though there is not the least doctrinal difference, that I know of, between the Church of England and the Methodists : and when the minister preaches according to the Articles, Homilies, &c., of which the Methodists are zealous advocates (2), they always attend his ministry, and frequently whether he do or not, though I cannot say whether this is altogether defensible ; so that they are very seldom called dissenters, or schismatics, by those who know

(1) Acts xxiv. 14. (2) See Mr. Wesley’s “Appeals”, &c.



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any thing of them; and surely those who do not, are criminal in condemning them as such.

But their Teachers are poor, illiterate men. This is a grievous offence to the children of the world, but it is astonishing that a Minister of Christ should urge this as a proof that they are not called nor qualified to preach the Gospel. Every Minister of the Church of England professes to be inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon him that office*; and is it rational to suppose that God hath such a respect to human learning and riches, that he never calls any to work in his vineyard but the wealthy and the learned? Nay, is it not more scriptural to believe the reverse, that not many (1) wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called? But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh might glory in his presence". (2) The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. And when God was made manifest in the flesh, although (3) the world was his, and the fulness thereof, he (4) made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant: though (5) heaven was his throne, and earth his foot-

* How guilty, then, are those Ministers, who after having made that solemn profession answer their vile ends, not only deny that inspiration themselves, but ridicule all who profess to experience the sacred privilege. Simon Magus is a fair character compared with these: he would have bought the Holy Ghost; these make the Holy Ghost procure them a living, and then utterly disclaim all connection with him.

(1) 1 Cor. i. 26, 27, 28, 29. (2) 1 Cor. iii. 19. (3) Ps. xxiv. 1. & 1 Cor. x. 26, 28. (4) Phil. ii. 7. (5) Isa. lxvi. 1. Acts vii. 49.

stool, yet (1) had he not where to lay his head : as an instance of his poverty, he (2) wrought a miracle to pay tribute with; teaching us, by his example, what estimation to put upon the riches and honours of the world. He chose the twelve, who were to spread the glad tidings of the Gospel, out of ordinary occupations ; and we do not read that either they, or any of their successors, were prepared for their office by a regular academical education : and as Jesus Christ and his followers did not display any worldly grandeur, he was despised and rejected of men. I think these considerations should prevent us from rejecting ministers for not possessing qualifications which were not required by Jesus Christ himself, and which the first preachers of the Gospel did not possess. Is the holy scripture so dark and intricate in treating on subjects, which essentially concern our salvation, as to require the aid of human learning to unravel and interpret it? By no means ; it is intelligible to the meanest capacity ; every thing relative to faith and practice is laid down in so full and (3) plain a manner, that he that (4) runneth may read, and the (5) wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. The most elaborate disquisitions on passages of scripture frequently contribute to obscure the sense, otherwise sufficiently plain ; and it is justly observed, that the sense in which a common man of ordinary capacity would understand any passage, is generally, if not always, the true sense of it. But I do not

(1) Matt. viii. 9. Luke ix. 58. (2) Matt. xvii. 27. (3) St. Austin says, " All things are *plainly* contained in scripture, which concern faith and a good life ". St. Chrysostom, " Whatever things are necessary are *plain*". And Archbisshop Tillotson, in his Rule of Faith, Pt. 2, ¶ 3, § 14, says, " Our Principle is, that the scripture doth sufficiently interpret itself; i. e., is *plain to all capacities*, in things necessary to be believed and practised. (4) Hab. ii. 2.

(5) Isa. xxxv. 8.

depreciate human learning because the Methodist Preachers are destitute of it; for they are not so ignorant as is industriously and maliciously represented, and which many are willing to believe: most of them have had liberal educations; many of them have been to college, and have been regularly ordained; and many others have, by their industry, made themselves superior to their adversaries in this respect, and might with the greatest propriety retort the charge. All I mean to infer is, that a knowledge of the languages, arts and sciences, cannot capacitate a man for the office of the ministry; neither does the want of it disqualify him. It is first considered, amongst the Methodists, whether the candidate be a person of unblameable conduct, and exemplary holiness of life; and whether he have a clear and distinct knowledge of divinity; and whether he have sufficient abilities for the work: and if he have a comprehensive knowledge of the learned tongues, it is a still greater recommendation. And that no improper persons may assume the office, they make repeated trials of their abilities before they are admitted as regular preachers; and after that, are four years on trial before they are taken into full connection. And *all* the preachers undergo a strict examination annually, and if any thing criminal be discovered against any of them, they are immediately expelled. So that I am persuaded there is no society of Christians in the world, wherein greater precautions are used to prevent improper persons and bad characters usurping the office of the Ministry; or any more particular in expelling them when discovered.

And the meanness of their followers, instead of being against them, is another argument in their favour; for if we compare them, and the usage they meet with in the world, to the immediate followers

of Christ, and their reception, we may observe a great similiarity; (1) we are fools, we are weak, we are dishonourable, we are despised, (2) we are made the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things unto this day: (3) but it is enough for the disciple to be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord; and we ought not to expect better usage from the world, than our Saviour himself received, who (4) was despised and rejected of men. Throughout the whole scriptures of truth, we find particular attention paid to the poor; (5) hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those that love him? But ye have despised the poor. If it were urged that the Methodists were as immoral in their conduct as others, it were a serious objection, but this can never be proved, but quite the reverse. But their poverty is a very senseless objection to them: even the heathen philosophers believed that worldly greatness and power are not to be admired, but rather despised of men; and it is certainly (6) "a conspicuous proof and example of how small estimation is exorbitant wealth in the sight of God, is his bestowing it upon the most unworthy of all mortals". But as Religion teaches men industry and frugality, so the ground of this objection has ceased to exist: and were the Methodists ambitious to display their wealth, they might produce numbers, who by their consequence and affluence would honour any party.

They undermine, and wish to overthrow, the Church. The idea I have of the Church of Christ, is, that it is composed of all those who are true

(1) 1 Cor. iv. 10. (2) 1 Cor. iv. 13. (3) Matt. x. 25.

(4) Isa. liii. 3. (5) James ii. 5, 6.

(6) Epitaph on Francis Chatres, by Dr. Arbuthnot.

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believers, those who (1) have escaped the pollutions of the world, and are the worshippers of the true God in Christ, according to his word, and who are united to him by living (2) faith, which works by love; these, however they may differ in nonessentials, are undeniably the (3) Church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood; and this is what is meant by the creed, "I believe in one catholic and apostolic Church"; the same by the prayer in the litany, for "the Holy Church universal"; and the prayer for "the whole state of Christ's Church militant here on earth", in the Communion Office: called by Ireneus and Origen, "the Church under Heaven". And I deny that the Methodists endeavour to diminish the number of these; as it is evident that by their instrumentality numbers are added to it, which before, whatever profession they might make of belonging to any particular Church, demonstrated that they did not belong to Christ. Or if by the Church, you mean the Church of England, I still deny that the Methodists endeavour to overthrow it; they only wish to reform its members, and surely any one must own the necessity of this, and applaud the design. And the cry of the Church being in danger, is only to exasperate people against them; like interested (4) Demetrius and his Craftsmen setting a whole city on an uproar against St. Paul, and his companions Gaius and Aristarchus, by crying out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians".

But that those are not in a saving state, who absent themselves from the ordinances of the Church of England, is an assertion grounded on neither reason nor revelation, but on illiberal and uncharitable supposition, and is what one should never expect to find,

(1) 2 Pet. ii. 20. (2) Gal. v. 6. (3) Acts xx. 28.

(4) Acts xix. 24. &c.

except in one of the Pope's anathematizing bulls. Is it not in the highest degree irrational to suppose, that all Quakers, Independents, Presbyterians, Baptists, &c., dying such, must infallibly be damned? Is it not more agreeable to the word of God and his moral attributes to believe, that of every nation, sect or party, (1) he that fears God, and works righteousness, is accepted of him; and that our different services will be accepted and rewarded by Jesus Christ, according to the rectitude of our several intentions? However, we had better leave the decision of these matters to the Judge of the whole earth, who (2) sitteth in his throne judging right; and not to intrude our insignificance into an office, which we are noways qualified for, and which we are well assured that the Most High will severely punish us for assuming.

“Let not this weak, unknowing hand,
Presume thy bolts to throw;
And deal damnation round the land,
On each I judge thy foe”.

But as the generality of the Methodists do attend the ordinances of the Church of England, as before observed; so even were this the case, they would have little to fear from this quarter.

I believe, Reverend Sir, that in the course of your sermon, you said the Methodists called themselves the Elect, &c. If you meant to charge them with holding unconditional election and reprobation, it is a notion so contrary to their sentiments, and which has been so universally exploded by them, both in the pulpit and the press, (3) that nothing could justify you, Reverend Sir, in accusing them of it.

(1) Acts x. 35. (2) Psa. ix. 4.

(3) See Rev. J. Wesley's “Predestination calmly considered”; Rev. J. Fletcher's “Checks”; &c.

If it proceeded from ignorance, it was inexcusable; if it were a wilful misrepresentation, it was in the highest degree criminal.

There were, I believe, several other parts of the sermon equally as exceptionable; but shall take no farther notice of them than just to observe, that groundless charges, and bitter invectives, are no arguments; nor do they do any service to the cause they are meant to support.

The Methodists are frequently denominated False Prophets, &c., by their ignorant opposers; but as this charge generally comes unsupported by any argument, it were needless to bestow any pains to refute it. False prophets are those, who prophesy or preach falsely, and, according to St. Peter, (1) privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And St. John gives us a criterion, whereby we may try these spirits, whether they be of God; (2) every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God, but one of those false prophets which he says are gone out into the world. And I leave it for any unprejudiced person to determine, how far the Methodist Preachers agree to the Apostles' definition of these false teachers or Prophets. The Prophets, Apostles (3), and Jesus Christ (4) himself, were all accused of being deceivers of the people.

Give me leave, Reverend Sir, to mention a plan, which was some time since devised and adopted for the extirpation of heresy, and which, I am sorry to say, met with your support; a method calculated to succeed better than reason and argument, or the

(1) 2 Pet. ii. 1. (2) 1 John iv. 1, 2, 3. (3) 2 Cor. vi. 8.

(4) John vii. 12. Matt. xxvii. 63. &c.

most threatening denunciations from the pulpit, by applying, not to the understandings, but the fears of men:

“A bold machine was form'd and join'd,
To stretch the conscience, and to bind
The native freedom of the mind”.

I mean the association to prevent those, whom you and the rest of the gentlemen who signed it had any influence over, from enjoying that liberty of conscience which God and the Nation allows. Tenants were to be turned from their farms, servants from their places, and labourers from their work; and every mean used effectually to ruin those who should attend the meetings. Thus every method has been taken, and every species of opposition employed, as far as the Law permits, (and rather further, if I be rightly informed), to force men's consciences. And when men proceed to such excesses in their opposition, it is readily discovered to what it is we owe the preservation of our lives; for I am persuaded, that the same bitter zeal that has hitherto been evinced on all occasions, were there no legal restraint, would drag the objects of its fury to the flame.

How different the conduct of our Saviour, whose example ought always to be strictly followed by all those who profess to be Christians. We read (1) that he reprimanded his disciples for forbidding one to cast out devils, (and converting souls is nearly synonymous), because he followed not with them. (2) And on another occasion, when James and John would have commanded fire to come from heaven to destroy their opposers, and instanced the similar conduct of Elias as a precedent, our Lord turned and rebuked them, and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. Archbishop Tillotson observes

(1) *Mark ix. 38, 39. Luke ix. 49, 50.* (2) *Luke ix. 54.*

from this passage, that "no case can be put with circumstances of greater advantage, or more likely to justify this spirit or temper, than this. Those against whom the disciples would have called for fire from heaven, were heretics and schismatics from the true Church ; they had affronted our Saviour himself, in his own person ; the honour of God and of that religion which he had set up in the world, and of Jerusalem, which he had appointed for the place of his worship, were all concerned in this case, so that if ever it were warrantable to put on this fierce and furious zeal, here was a case that seemed to require it : but even in these circumstances our Saviour thinks fit to rebuke and discountenance this spirit, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: and he gives such a reason as ought in all differences of religion, how wide soever they be, to deter men from this temper ; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them ; that is, this spirit is utterly inconsistent with the great design of the Christian religion, and the end of our Saviour's coming into the world". Jesus Christ used gentle and peaceable means, and mild persuasives, to propagate Christianity ; he never either violently forced any to embrace it, nor temporally punished any for neglecting it. And St. Paul had learnt a better temper than to oppose even his personal enemies who preached the gospel; (1) " notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached ; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice : and in his 2nd Epistle to Timothy he says, (2) the servant of the Lord must not strive ; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach and patient ; in meekness instructing even those who oppose themselves to the gospel. How then can vain dust and

(1) Philip. i. 18. (2) 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25. & Titus iii. 2.

ashes assume and exercise that authoritative and vindictive spirit against those who differ from them in nonessentials, which God himself did not think fit to employ even against those who opposed Christianity, and which he discountenanced in his followers? It is certain, from the nature of the gospel, and the example of Jesus Christ, that no pretences whatever can justify coercive measures, in religious matters.

It is extremely ridiculous for any mortal to interfere between the creature and the Creator, and to prescribe how the Almighty shall be worshipped. What man has a right to force his particular method of worship upon the rest of his fellow-creatures, as far as his influence extends? Such absolute dominion over the consciences of men, is more than the Apostles themselves claimed (1), who were under the immediate direction of God. What then can be our pretensions to it? It is most certainly the indubitable privilege of every man to think and act for himself, particularly in matters of religion, because every man must answer for his principles and practices at the throne of God; and for this reason, no one is authorised to impose his opinions on another, no farther than this can be effected by sound, scriptural argumentation. The Bishop of Landaff, in his Charge to the Clergy of his Diocese, June 1791, treats this subject very ably; in page 17, he says, "It must be admitted as a fundamental truth, derived from the equality in which we all stand to Christ our common Master, that no society of Christians whatever, however distinguished by rank, power, wealth, numbers, learning, can have the least claim to any just authority, of compelling others, by threats or calumnies, or penalties of any kind, to a fellowship of worship: you, they ought to say to all those who

(1) 2 Cor. i. 24. 1 Pet. v. 3. &c.



dissent from them, are free as well as we are, we affect no dominion over your faith, we are not the lords of God's heritage ; go, and worship the Creator and Conservator of the Universe in your own way” ; &c. But how exceedingly wrong is it for one mortal to force, by all means in his power, another of his fellow-creatures, possessed of the same, or perhaps greater degrees of knowledge and abilities than himself, to conform to his religious sentiments in every respect, and can assign no other reason for his compulsion than his being in more affluent circumstances, or having, perhaps from interest, espoused the most popular opinions :

— “ Oh ! but man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
(Most ignorant of what he’s most assur’d,
His glassy essence), like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As makes the angels weep !”

From the active opposition the Methodists meet with in this and some other places, one unacquainted with them would be led to conclude that they held the most nefandous principles, were the most inveterate enemies to all order and good government, and were guilty of the most egregious enormities that ever disgraced the human character ; and even were this the case, it were hard to say whether such inveterate opposition were justifiable. But is not the reverse exceedingly obvious ? I am bold to aver, none are more holy and exemplary in their conduct, or better subjects to the governments under which they live, than the Methodists taken collectively are ; and for the truth of this assertion I durst appeal to the Nation, “ if they would testify”. As a religious body their design was to reform mankind, and that laudable motive still continues to actuate their views : not

content with confining their exertions to these nations, numbers of them have left their native land, and have encountered innumerable difficulties, to spread the glad tidings of the gospel in distant regions; America has long witnessed the success of their labours, and it is hoped that through their instrumentality, the idolatrous African will learn to worship God in spirit and in truth (1). But we need not to advert to foreign countries for proofs of the unwearied diligence and success of their ministers, and the exemplary conduct of their followers, when this nation affords so conspicuous an example: here they generally preach two, three, or four times every sabbath, and once or more on almost every other day; besides other ministerial labours, and the difficulties necessarily attendant upon an itinerant plan, which however ridiculed, was that of Jesus Christ and his disciples (2). And it is evident that nothing but a regard for the glory of God, and an earnest desire for the salvation of souls, could influence men to engage in so laborious a work, as their temporal reward is barely food and raiment, with a plentiful share of the impertinent indignities of a foolish world: and they may say with the Psalmist, (3) our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those which are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud. And the conduct of their followers sufficiently distinguishes them from their opposers, as a (4) peculiar people, zealous of good works: and though you may not know the truth of this assertion from your own personal observation or acquaintance, yet there are two indelible proofs of it, which cannot

(1) This laudable undertaking has met with a liberal support from some of the first nobility and gentry of this kingdom; the mission is under the direction of Dr. Coke.

(2) Matt. x. Luke x. &c. (3) Psa. cxxiiii. 4. (4) Titus ii. 14.

have escaped your notice. One is, that if it ever happen that a Methodist disgraces his profession, it is noised abroad far and near, his crime amazingly exaggerated, and the subject of almost universal exultation; while the very same offence, in a different character, would be entirely overlooked, as a case too common for animadversion. This sufficiently proves that instances of this kind are very uncommon amongst them. The other is, if a person of any denomination whatever, be particularly pious and conscientious, fearing God and eschewing evil, and especially if he reprove sin on all occasions, he will most certainly be called a Methodist. Thus it may be proved even by the testimony of their enemies, that piety and holiness, and a fervent zeal for the glory of God, are the distinguishing features of this sect. And though they are assiduously watched by a malignant world, which is blind to their virtues, and lynx-eyed to their failings, yet as men can very seldom derive any pretext for their opposition from their immorality, that they may oppose them under some specious pretence, they blacken their characters by uncharitably attributing their zealous attachment to religion to hypocritical motives; though nothing can be more absurd: not that I say there are *no* deceivers amongst them; even in the twelve whom Jesus Christ chose, there was an impostor, (1) have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? And in the best regulated societies there will be those whose crimes will remain undiscovered, and elude the utmost vigilance of their brethren; who outwardly (2) appear righteous to men, but within are full of iniquity; who (3) worship God with their lips, while their hearts are far from him; and through whose impenetrable cloke of hypocrisy, nothing but

(1) John vi. 70. (2) Matt. xxiii. 28. (3) Matt. xv. 18.

the flaming eyes of Omnicience can pierce. But a hypocrite generally assumes that character, which he has reason to believe will be most applauded, or best answer his mercenary designs; and for this reason there are but *very few* hypocritical Methodists, as in that profession they would subject themselves to malicious persecutions and reproaches, without any prospect of pecuniary advantage.

But it is undeniably plain, Reverend Sir, that the present opposition, whatever plausible reasons may be assigned for it, is nothing else but an opposition to genuine Christianity; a species of that persecution, which the Church of Christ has ever experienced. The persecutions of Jesus Christ and his Apostles were inconceivably severe, and were terminated by the most excruciating torments that the hatred of diabolical men could devise; they all sealed the divine truths they taught with their blood, except one, whom the malice of his enemies was not permitted to destroy: and their followers expected, and generally experienced, the same fate. And when Christianity became so universal as to be established, and was corrupted, the then pretended Christian potentates excelled even the persecuting heathens, in their bloody violence against those who worshipped God in spirit and in truth. And now Popery is reformed, it is lamentable that the same spirit of persecution is retained by many; and who would, were they not restrained, most certainly proceed against those who differ from them, with the same bitter zeal which has hitherto disgraced all establishments. All the memorable reformers of the corruptions of Christianity, met with the fiercest opposition from those they meant to reform, though after ages, feeling the benefits of their exertions, applauded their memories. The kingdom of this world, and that

of Jesus Christ, are irreconcilable enemies (1), and when the god of this world sees his empire in danger of being diminished or overthrown by the powerful efforts of genuine Christianity, he employs his faithful subjects to oppose it with all possible fury (2); and though his power is considerably restrained, and the spirit of persecution much abated, yet it will never wholly subside while the Devil can raise the feeblest opposition, but must eternally fall when Christianity universally prevails.

Persecution is not absolutely confined to one party, but (3) all those that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution; and if the Methodists have a plentiful share of it, it only serves to show that they are the true lovers of Christ; but if they were applauded by the world, it would demonstrate to the contrary, and be a dreadful omen: (4) Wo unto you, when all men shall speak well of you; for so did their fathers to the false prophets: and St. Paul says, (5) if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But owing to the interference of wholesome laws, persecution is now much restrained, and is chiefly confined to contumelious language and opprobrious epithets; and the world seems content with (6) laughing the just, upright man to scorn, without doing him any *personal* injury; except in those places which are destitute of the faintest ideas of civil or religious liberty, of which this town is a notorious instance: and if you, and the rest of the gentlemen, &c., who have joined in a league together, very similar in design to that recorded in the 23rd chapter of Acts, should on no other pretence whatever than for attending the Methodist meetings here, drive an

(1) Matt. xvi. 13. 2 Cor. vi. 15. Jam. iv. 4. 1 John ii. 15. &c.

(2) 2 Cor. vi. 15. Rev. ii. 10. xii. 17. (3) 2 Tim. iii. 12.

(4) Luke vi. 26. (5) Gal. i. 10. (6) Job xii. 4.

honest tenant from his farm, possessed perhaps by his forefathers, and force him probably at an advanced period in life from his home, to seek his daily bread in some distant place by some unknown way, and he and his family reduced to the most abject poverty; or should you discharge a poor labourer, and deny him the means of getting his bread by the sweat of his brow amongst you, and before he can find another situation where he may earn his maintenance, he and his family from a comfortable livelihood, are brought to the greatest degree of want and wretchedness, and the poor sufferer unable to bear the pressure of such heavy and combined calamities, sink under them, and leaves his lone widow and his helpless orphans to the mercy of his merciless persecutors: yet there is one consolation for these innocent sufferers, which more than counterbalances all their afflictions, and which it is out of the power of their destroyers to wrest from them; that Jesus Christ has bid them (1) rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is their reward in heaven; that those who have thus forsaken (2) houses and land for his sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and inherit eternal life; that their (3) light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for them a far more exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. But it may be replied, this is an imaginary scene....It is not; it has been realised: and moreover, were every one in your opinion, and had made similar resolutions, starving would be the unavoidable consequence upon a poor man's turning Methodist, possessed of sufficient resolution not to swerve from his principles, or be (4) awed by those who can kill the body, and after that have nothing more which they can do. But

- (1) Matt. v. 12. (2) Matt. xix. 29. (3) 2 Cor. iv. 17.
 (4) Matt. x. 28. Luke xii. 4.

they might avoid these sufferings.... Yes, they might avoid them, by sacrificing their liberties, by suffering themselves to be directed how and where to worship God, and by a compliance to such directions, though contrary to their consciences ; by neglecting that, to which they know it is their duty to adhere : but a spirited and zealous Christian, however poor and dependent, will detest such implicit compliances and complete vassalage, and such infamous proposals ought always to be despised. The Pope burnt his opposers, and you would starve *yours* ; and where's the mighty difference ? How does this spirit become a follower, much leis a Minister of the meek and benevolent Jesus ? How unlike that Being, to whom vengeance properly and exclusively belongeth (1), who commandeth us to love even our enemies (2), and who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust (3).

But persecution always defeats its own purpose, and strengthens that cause it means to destroy. Mankind are too jealous of their independence, and have too great regard for their liberty, than to be violently forced into, or from any opinion :

“ Beasts act by force, and are by force restrain'd ;
The human mind by gentler means is gain'd ”.

And though Methodism has met with the most furious persecution, and still continues to have its opposers, yet the united efforts of its enemies could not check its growth ; and it is now become too formidable, and its effects too obvious, to be injured by ridicule or opposition : and it now stands in greater danger from the smiles and approbation of the world, than ever it did from its frowns and persecutions ;

(1) Rom. xii. 9. (2) Matt. v. 44. (3) Matt. v. 45.

as it generally meets with a favourable reception, except in those places which are blinded by prejudice, bigotry, or invincible ignorance.

It was observed, and with considerable applause by many, that in the delivery of the sermon refered to, you exerted yourself particularly: but what can there be in a few meeting together to worship God, and hear his word expounded, to deserve such severe and vehement reproof; especially as their times do not interfere with those of the Church service? I would humbly propose other meetings, which are composed of those who so strenuously oppose ours, as deserving your ministerial censure. There are meetings held at the ale-houses, on Sunday evenings, which, however they might be regulated, are most certainly unjustifiable, as it is not remembering the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy; but it is well known they are disgraced by drunkenness, and every species of unprofitable, sinful and lewd conversation, (1) foolish talking and jesting, which is not convenient. It appears exceedingly strange that these, devoted to the service of Bacchus, remain unnoticed, and consequently countenanced, while those for the service of Almighty God are the subject of the severest reprehension. When some annual festival (which if at all observed, ought to be celebrated with reverence and solemnity) has collected people together, there are meetings which continue whole nights in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness (2), and in merriments and exercises equally repugnant to reason and scripture: these are quite overlooked, while those of the Methodists are publickly represented as enthusiastical and sinful (3). Men of the worst of principles and most infamous conduct are

(1) Ephe. v. 4. (2) Rom. xiii. 13.

(3) "Dat veniam corvis, vexat censura columbas". Juv. Sat. 2.

caressed and esteemed ; those whom the Apostle St. Paul forbids Christians (1) to eat with, are admitted to the table of the Lord, where they profess to be in love and charity with all mankind, while they are persecuting and doing all possible disservice to all who differ from them. These are applauded, whilst a Methodist, however unimpeachable in his conduct, is (2) hated, separated from company, and his name cast out as evil. There is no combination to prevent or discountenance vice and immorality....No; liberty to serve the devil is allowed, but no liberty to serve God: all ungodly, unthankful, unholy men ; all villains, of whatever denomination, will have liberty of conscience indeed all the world over, as long as their master is god of this world; but we expect not liberty to worship God in spirit and in truth, to practise pure and undefiled religion, (unless the Lord should work a new thing in the earth), from any but those, who themselves love and serve God.

Although (3) these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also, yet (4) ye ought to be quiet, and do nothing rashly; and instead of combining against them, and crying out (5) men of Israel help, these are they which teach all men every where, against the people, the law, and the temple ; (6) these fellows persuade men to worship God contrary to law!! (7) away with such fellows from the earth, they are not fit to live ; you should have recollect ed the advice of Gamaliel on a similiar occasion, (8) "I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone ; for if this council or this work be of men, it will come to nought, but if it be

(1) 1 Cor. v. 11. (2) Luke vi. 22. (3) Acts xvii. 6. (4) The advice of the Town Clerk of Ephesus, Acts xix. 36. (5) Acts xxi. 28. (6) Acts xviii. 13. (7) Acts xxii. 22. (8) Acts v. 38, 39.

of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God". And the amazing increase and prosperity of Methodism, even when all human means were employed to crush and destroy it, unconsumed, like Moses' bush, (1) amidst the flames of persecution; and the good effects it produces in the world, sufficiently demonstrate it to be of God: and we rest assured that the same Almighty hand that has raised the goodly fabrick, and has defended it from those fierce storms of persecution to which it has been exposed, will continue his divine protection, and though the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon it (2), it shall defy their combined violence, being immoveably fixed upon the rock of eternal ages. And I would seriously advise those, whose blind zeal has hurried them into such unjustifiable opposition, to take care how they counteract the designs, and oppose the work of God. (3) Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the Prophets: Behold ye despisers, and wonder, and perish! for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in nowise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

The innumerable quarrels and disturbances that have been occasioned by the most trivial differences in religious sentiments, have disgraced Christianity, and have furnished its enemies with plausible objections against it; though those violent contentions ought by no means to be imputed to the nature and tendency of our religion, but to the blind and fiery zeal of its perverters and corruptors: and it is high time to dismiss this spirit, for in this *age of Infidelity*, Christians of all denominations should cease to be each other's persecutors, and should forget those little differences which have hitherto set them at variance,

(1) Exodus iii. 2, 3. (2) Matt. vii. 25. (3) Acts xiii. 40, 41.

and mutually defend each other from, and unite in repelling the attacks of an enemy, which equally threatens the existence of them all: but if they bite and (1) devour one another, there will be no need of the intervention of a foreign enemy to destroy them, but they will be consumed of each other. And if our different conceptions constrain us to dissent from each other, in some parts of inconsiderable consequence, yet let us not forget those main and essential truths in which we all agree: we are all the offspring of one Parent (2), and owe our preservation to the same almighty Power (3); we walk by the (4) same divine rule, are (5) partakers of the heavenly calling, are the (6) purchase of the same Redeemer, through whose merits and mediation we are made heirs of that kingdom (7) which he has promised to those that love him, and which, if we be willing and obedient, we shall eternally enjoy. Let us, who are thus united in the same grand fundamentals, through distinguished by some small circumstantial, (8) be kindly affectioned one to another; love as (9) brethren, and in honour prefer one another; and let us avoid and abhor that narrowness of spirit, which confines religion to those only, who exactly coincide with ourselves in every minutiae of faith and practice.

I am willing to attribute your opposition to the Methodists to ignorance and misrepresentation; yet you should not (10) speak evil of those things which you know not. Jesus the son of Sirach says, (11) Blame not before thou hast examined the truth, understand first and then rebuke: and I sincerely hope

- (1) Gal. v. 15. (2) Acts xvii. 28. (3) Neh. ix. 6. Psa. cxlv. 20.
 (4) Phil. iii. 16. (5) Heb. iii. 1. (6) Rom. iii. 24. (7) Jam. ii. 5. (8) Rom. xii. 10. (9) 1 Pet. iii. 8. (10) Jude 10.
 (11) Apoc. Eccl. xii. 17.

you will take such means of information, as will convince you that this sect, which (1) is every where spoken against, though represented by (2) good report, and evil report, as deceivers, is yet true; and under the influence of this conviction you will cease to oppose them, and withdraw your support and sanction from that infamous combination, which cannot sufficiently be reprobated.

If I have been misinformed respecting any of the passages in your sermon, (though this is very improbable), I hope you will be kind enough to forgive the observations resulting from such misinformation: certain I am, that I know what was the intention of your discourse, and I have the greatest reason to believe that I have not been misinformed concerning the substance of it. But the other circumstance alluded to in this letter is of a far more heinous nature, even than making the pulpit the vehicle of abuse, and is nothing better than a limited *parochial inquisition*. My design in this has been according to my ability, to vindicate those whom you have, without the least reason or provocation, severely censured and opposed, and to expostulate with you on the folly and impropriety of such conduct; in doing this, I have exceeded my intended limits, though I have omitted several observations which I meant to have inserted. You may easily observe, that I have avoided recrimination as much as possible, even where it might have been introduced with advantage to my cause. But I am afraid all I can say on this subject, will be insufficient to dissuade you from your opposition.— May God Almighty convince you of your error, and shew you the folly and sinfulness of such conduct, and incline your heart to obey that gospel

(1) Acts xxviii. 22. (2) 2 Cor. vi. 8.

precept, in its full force and extent, (1) all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them. I am, Reverend Sir, with all due respect,

Your most obedient servant,

MICHAEL THOMAS SADLER,

*DOVERIDGE,
April 3, 1797.*

(1) Matt. vii. 12.

